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Chairman Joseph R. Pitts
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives
Congress of the United States

Dear Chairman Pitt,

This statement is in response to your request that I testify before your subcommittee hearing on "A Review of Efforts to Protect the Health of Jockeys and Horses in Horse Racing". My remarks are brief and represent my own personal views. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the UC Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine or the University of California.

I preface my remarks by saying that I was engaged in a Thoroughbred racetrack practice for 27 years prior to my returning to academia. Since 1998 I have been the Director of the UC Davis, Center for Equine Health. As an integral part of that job I am in daily contact with horse enthusiasts and industry executives and individuals from all walks of the equine sport horse and pleasure industry. I am also in continual contact with individuals and organizations concerned with animal welfare who may, or may not, be knowledgeable about horses. Consequently, I am exposed to much of the public's perception and opinions regarding horses and their use in sporting activities.

Based on those contacts and assessments I draw the following conclusions:

The public is overwhelmingly opposed to the use of any type of drugs in horseracing, whether they are judged to be performance enhancing or not or whether they are legally permitted or not. The perception is that drugs are associated with catastrophic injuries and malfeasance in gambling. They believe it puts the lives of horses and jockeys at risk and want it stopped.

Based upon that reality, my comment to your committee and to the horseracing industry in general is the same. It matters not whether you are personally for, or against, the use of drugs if you do not totally remove them from racing you will gradually lose your fan base and eventually kill your sport.

Additionally, based upon my personal experience with, and knowledge of, the horseracing industry, I would make the following remarks.

It is possible and safe to conduct racing in the United States without the use of performance enhancing drugs administered in close proximity to race time. That includes the use of furosemide and NSAID's. Other countries throughout the racing world conduct successful and humane racing programs without permitted medications. There is no valid reason, in my mind why we could not do the same in the United States. Those who fear the lack of drug availability do so largely because they always used them and have no experience in racing without them.

Secondly, given the maze of state and local controlling jurisdictions in charge of racing throughout the United States, and the divergent financial interests involved; I see no way of solving this issue short of a federal rule. Individual racing jurisdictions cannot ban the use of permitted medications in their local area without the fear of losing horses to another that permits their use. Only when a national rule is in place that has significant legally enforceable penalties will individual states, racing jurisdictions and horsemen comply. I believe that a national rule banning drugs will go a long way to bringing back fans to a wonderful and exciting sport.

This concludes my prepared remarks to the committee. I would be happy to answer any questions the members may have or provide the committee with any further information they may request in the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

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